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First Circuit affirms conviction of Operation Royal Flush defendant

Joel “Joey Crack” Francisco was sentenced to life imprisonment for crack cocaine trafficking

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit has affirmed the conviction of Joel Francisco, a leader of the Latin Kings street gang in Rhode Island, who was sentenced to life in federal prison last year for a crack cocaine trafficking conspiracy.

United States Attorney Robert Clark Corrente announced the decision, which the First Circuit issued yesterday. Appellate Chief Donald C. Lockhart argued the appeal for the government.

The Circuit rejected several challenges that Francisco made concerning the use of federal wire tap laws and testimony provided by Providence Police detectives during his trial.

“Francisco has failed to show that the rulings (by the trial judge) were in error,” the Court wrote in its opinion. “The evidence of guilt was overwhelming,” the Court noted.

In April 2005, a jury found Francisco guilty of possessing with intent to distribute 500 grams or more of cocaine and possessing with intent to distribute 50 grams or more of crack cocaine. In September 2005, U.S. District Court Judge Mary M. Lisi sentenced Francisco to life in prison. Because Francisco, who is also known as “Joey Crack,” had two prior felony drug convictions, his conviction for trafficking in more than 50 grams of crack cocaine rendered the life sentence mandatory under federal drug sentencing law. There is no parole from a federal life sentence.

During the trial, Assistant U.S. Attorneys Mary E. Rogers and Stephen G. Dambruch presented evidence that, on October 24, 2004, Providence Police detectives and Drug Enforcement Administration agents seized nearly a kilogram of cocaine, 100 grams of it in crack form, from an apartment that Francisco rented on Dexter Street, Providence.

During a multi-agency investigation known as **Operation Royal Flush**, agents had monitored conversations in which Francisco discussed drug deals in coded language. In his appeal, Francisco challenged the use of wire taps, but the Circuit Court agreed with the government's assertion that the wiretaps were a necessary investigative tool for several reasons, including the secrecy of the Latin Kings organization.

Eight other defendants pleaded guilty to federal charges as a result of Operation Royal Flush and were sentenced to prison.

Providence Police and the **Drug Enforcement Administration** led the **Operation Royal Flush Task Force**, in coordination with the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Rhode Island Attorney General's Office. Six other federal, state, and municipal law enforcement agencies contributed resources: the **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives**, the **Federal Bureau of Investigation**, the **Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement**, the **U.S. Marshals Service**, **Rhode Island State Police**, and **East Providence Police**.

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